

ENRIQUETA ZAFRA. *Lazarillo de Tormes. A Graphic Novel*. Illus. Jesús Mora. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2021. xv + 124 pp.

The return of a picaresque anti-hero. The fight for literary justice. A visual vindication of previously censored text. A mission to contextualize, entertain, and ignite critical discussion. These motivating forces gave rise to Enriqueta Zafra and Jesús Mora's *Lazarillo de Tormes. A Graphic Novel*. Zafra (author) and Mora's (illustrator) is the latest attempt at reimagining the sixteenth-century picaresque tale in visual-verbal form and is a long-overdue development from children's comics and illustrated versions that exist to date (see the Introduction for some titles). What we are presented with is part graphic novel, part comics journalism and altogether the epitome of the recent comics-as-scholarship phenomenon (not to be confused with scholarship *about* comics, which we can hope this important book will in turn inspire).

Throughout 120 pages, Mora's visual narrative, achieved with ink and watercolour, and which features varying degrees of realism and caricaturing, and at times even an onomatopoeic mainstream comic book style, keeps pace with the complex comic's shifting components. Episodes surrounding the historical background of the literary text – its fourteen-year prohibition and subsequent censorship in 1573, matters of early translation, and of its popular (then) and critical (now) reception – are interspersed with the seven adapted episodes of Lázaro's tale. *Lazarillo de Tormes. A Graphic Novel* is much more than its title leads us to believe!

The book opens with an Introduction in prose form. As it is customary, Zafra traces the evolution of picaresque literature from sixteenth-century Spain through eighteenth-century England with Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), and nineteenth-century America with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Zafra argues that offshoots of the literary genre can be found here, in the twenty-first century, with books like Rich Terfry's *Wicked and Weird: The Amazing Tales of Buck 65* (2015). Zafra goes on to describe in detail the methodological process behind the graphic novel adaptation. These include the creative decision to integrate new characters: there is a cameo by Cervantes, who "is, after all, the ultimate reader" (xii), and appearances by Inquisitor Generals Fernando Valdés and Diego de Espinosa who, under King Phillip II's rule, castigated "the text itself with a censored version" with the goal of "protect[ing] the powerful" (xiii). The discussion also encompasses the adaptation's interpretive approach and pedagogical possibilities as well as the ways in which the graphic novel contributes to recent attempts in *Lazarillo* studies to bring critical attention to the castigated version (xiv).

Although an editor's introduction is tradition, this is not a traditional text. One cannot help but wonder if the placement of this piece of prose does not undermine the critical and communicative power that the graphic novel itself holds, and inhibit the reader's ability (whether comics-literate or not and picaresque-learned or not) to first draw their own conclusions. Perhaps this relevant information would be better situated as an afterword, or repurposed as a teaching guide, especially as much of it is artfully illustrated in the sections that immediately follow: "1553" (1), "A Brief Note on the English Translation" (3-4), "Four Editions" (5), and "The 'Case' in Question" (6), an adaptation of the prologue into five panels on a single page.

If, for the sixteenth-century reader, entertainment from visualizing Lázaro's adventures and misfortunes was an intended effect, the literal visualization of these in the comics form enhances this experience for the contemporary reader-viewer. Just as we witness firsthand, for example, the great lengths the boy goes to in pilfering the wine and sausage of his first master, we cannot unsee (though we do not fully see, thanks to a cloud of onomatopoeias) the beating Lázaro suffers when this and other ploys fail.



Figura 1. *Lazarillo de Tormes: A Graphic Novel* (29)

Here, as elsewhere, we come to appreciate how Mora artfully draws a parallel between sixteenth-century picaresque tales and early-twentieth-century mainstream action/adventure comics as being connected to popular culture. However, central to this adaptation are not attacks on Lázaro's body, but rather those on the textual body of *Lazarillo castigado* (censored). While Mora's nuanced watercolour technique aptly portrays the *pícaro*'s narrative transparency, it also depicts opacity on the part of the clerical figures whose abuse of power and morality is called into question. These types are rendered far more transparent in "Fourth Chapter" (97-98) and "Fifth Chapter" (99-101), which, we are unmistakably made aware, were excessively censored by humanist and court bureaucrat Juan López de Velasco's hand.

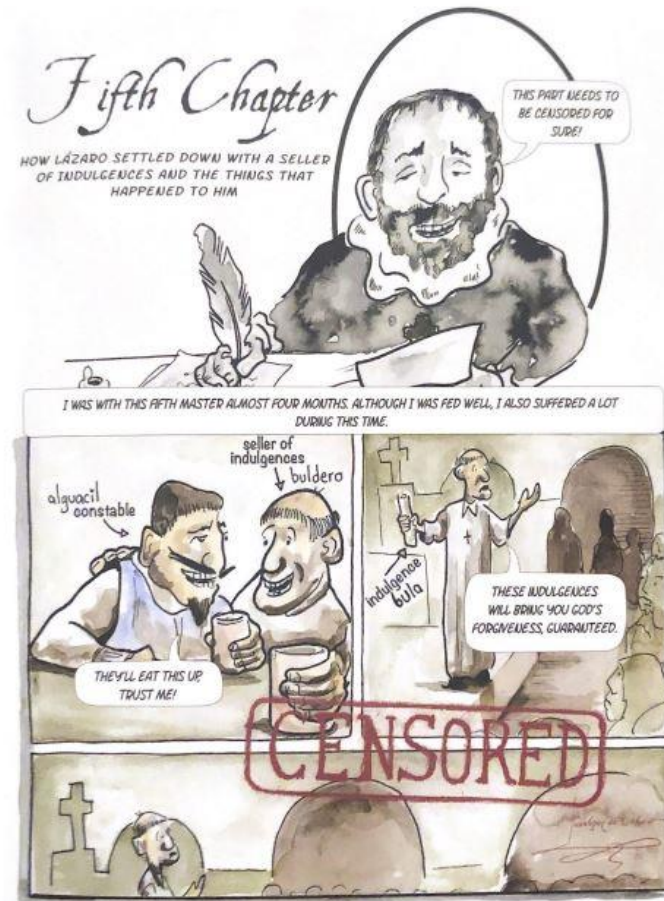


Figura 2. *Lazarillo de Tormes: A Graphic Novel* (99)

The highly caricatured style predominant in the adapted episodes contrasts the realism seen in the journalistic “2019” (55-66), which, portrays a lecture given by Brock University’s Dr. Felipe Ruan on the 1992 discovery of a fourth “original” version in Spain’s Extremadura region, an event which is also detailed. This chapter, like “1599” before it (33-37), in which Zafra and Mora imagine Cervantes’s enthused encounter with the *Lazarillo castigado*, proves why this text “giv[es] the reader a complete and immersive experience” (xi).

A first of its kind from UTP’s Toronto Iberic Series, this graphic novel will inform and delight students of Spanish literature at all levels as well as the general comics reader. Moreover, this scholarly project should interest practitioners of picaresque studies and comics studies alike. It joins other adapted early modern Spanish texts mentioned in the Introduction, such as *El Buscón en las Indias* (Norma, 2019), *The Complete Don Quixote* (SelfMadeHero, 2013) and *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (Penn State UP, 2018) (xi, n1). A surprising omission here, however, is Luis and Enrique Cabezón’s *El guitón honofre* (Kabemayor, 2005). Nevertheless, this precedent-setting publication that moves beyond dynamics of adaptation (and by extension translation) to colorfully *contextualize* and foreground investigation through the illustration of erasure should stand at the top of any list – no matter how complete.

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